

Reviews

Elaine Tyler May and Reinhold Wagnleitner (eds.), *'Here, There and Everywhere': The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2000, ix + 356 pp., ISBN: 0-58465-034-6 £45.00 cloth, 0-58465-035-6 £18.95 paper.

What precisely does it mean when people around the world wear Tommy Hilfiger clothes, listen to Rieky Martin, or watch *Friends* on television? Critical interest in the global role of United States popular culture continues, and academics from many disciplines rally to the field. One of the latest contributions is the result of exemplary transatlantic collaboration between Elaine Tyler May of the University of Minnesota and Reinhold Wagnleitner of the University of Salzburg, who have collected nineteen articles by scholars from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. *'Here, There and Everywhere'* makes a virtue of unevenness and attempts to address 'the global politics of American popular culture' through an impressive variety of style (from conventional critical analysis to personal reflection), method (from sweeping historical overviews to case studies), and topic (from blackface minstrelsy in the nineteenth century to the Internet). The editors have imposed order by arranging the articles into five overlapping parts: part I about historical background, part II about film and television, part III about music, part IV with more personal impressions, and part V about contemporary issues. Yet the volume is unmistakably inclusive. By bringing together material from completely different contexts, the editors have wanted to suggest the confusing diversity of the entire field, as well as hint at some of the possible connections.

'Here, There and Everywhere' is tied together by a unifying wisdom that privileges agency over domination, according to current academic vogue. There are two exceptions. In one article, Nosa Owens-Ibie argues that Nigeria has been homogenized by United States domination in television, while Gulriz Buken in a cranky diatribe argues that vulgar Americanization has undermined Turkish national tradition. Except for these lonely dissenters, the contributors generally argue that those who are on the receiving end of United States popular culture filter it through their own identities and organize it into local expression. As active participants, they appropriate United States popular culture and access it in order to enact meaning in their own lives. United States popular culture, in other words, is a vehicle for independent self-expression. This consensus view is argued most cogently in Masako Notoji's article about the Japanese transformation of John Philip Sousa and Disneyland, and especially in Cristoph Ribbat's astute article about rap music in Germany. Ribbat shows how German youths have taken elements of a self-consciously 'black' culture and developed a German hip hop culture with independent conventions and forms. Instead of imitating hip hop from the United States, they have accessed it to enhance their local expressions.

As always, the contributions fluctuate in quality. Several of the contributions simply add too little, often because they are based on scanty research, or because they

participate in the national stereotyping about the United States that the authors allegedly want to dismantle. In their article about Irish and English repertoires of ideas about the United States, Myles Dungan and David Gray, for instance, aim for witty deconstruction, but border on smug condescension. Yet the volume is generally redeemed by the solid research and brilliant insights in several of the other articles. One of the highlights is Penny M. Von Eschen's article about the relationship between jazz and empire during the Cold War. While the United States government attempted to mobilize touring African-American jazz musicians in order to give an impression of improved race relations as well as of national independence and spontaneity, this ideological use of jazz was strongly contested by politicians, diplomats, and musicians. Especially interesting is her account of the 1962 musical revue *The Real Ambassadors* by Louis Armstrong and Iola and Dave Brubeck, a witty satire on the attempt by the United States government to use jazz as an armory in international exchange.

However, most of the contributions in *'Here, There and Everywhere'* suffer from two related problems, which both touch on the fashionable academic talk of agency. First of all, few of the authors successfully show how consumers in particular circumstances actually use United States popular culture. They routinely argue that reception has depended on local factors, and they are almost certainly right. Yet their evidence is scant, and accordingly, the invocation of local agency primarily works through empty hypotheses, not through verifiable documentation. Second, there is sometimes an unnecessary celebration of agency, as if agency is something that only happens through the heroic resistance of appropriating consumers. This naive view completely ignores the strong similarities of interest between corporate transmission and local reception. As Rob Kroes reminds us in an article about advertising, United States corporations today consistently make an effort to connect locally, or at least to give an impression of connecting locally, through a strategy of multilocalism that deliberately works to make corporate products blend into local cultures. Corporations, in other words, invite local 'appropriation' in order to maximize their own profit.

These reservations aside, *'Here, There and Everywhere'* is an important volume that adds substantially to the existing criticism of the global role of United States popular culture. And for once, 'global' means something more than the familiar transatlantic relationship between Europe and the United States. While several articles deal with familiar examples from Western Europe, the volume begins to break the Eurocentric biases of many similar works by juxtaposing the European examples with examples from South Africa, Nigeria, Japan, Turkey, and Russia.